Coalition Files Suit to Block Destruction of Files by FBI

By Robert Pear
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Several dozen political activists, historians, scientists and writers filed suit against the FBI today, seeking a court injunction to halt the further destruction of FBI records.

A lawyer for the plaintiff, Marshall Perlin, said at a news conference here that the government was engaged in "massive destruction of FBI files of the most tremendous historical interest."

He said the destruction of records by the FBI was covering up "acts of criminality, violations of law and infringements upon millions of people's constitutional rights."

The 48 plaintiffs include Michael and Robert Meeropol, the sons of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg; filmmaker Emile de Antonio; political activist Angela Davis; author Jessica Mitford; writer Victor Navasky; biologist George Wald, and Morton Sobell, a co-defendant with the Rosenbergs.

Among the groups joining in the lawsuit, which was filed here in U.S. District Court, are the American Friends Service Committee, the American Indian Movement, the Center for National Security Studies, and Historians for Freedom of Information. The Nation magazine was also a plaintiff.

Named as defendants are FBI Director William H. Webster, Atty. Gen. Griffin Bell, U.S. Archivist James B. Rhoads and Paul E. Goulding, acting head of the General Services Administration.

An FBI official in charge of records management, James W. Awe, asked about the charges in the lawsuit, said, "Their concerns are completely unfounded." He said the FBI had not destroyed any "substantive information" in files at headquarters, and he said that field offices must send headquarters a copy or summary of important aspects of all their records.

Awe said the FBI must get rid of obsolete files in order to manage current records efficiently.